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ABSTRACT

The Lansing Area Manufacturing Partnership (LAMP) is an academically rigorous, business/labor-driven school-to-career program in Lansing, Michigan, that includes business, union, school, and parent partners and emphasizes work-based and project-based learning, team teaching, and opportunities for staff and students to establish close and ongoing interaction with employers. LAMP's impacts were evaluated in a case study involving the following data collection methods: observations; focus groups of students and employers; interviews with LAMP instructors, mentors, administrators, and others; reviews of program materials and records; and surveys of graduates of the classes of 1998 and 1999, parents of the class of 1999, and workplace personnel. Many individual employers, union members, parents, and mentors who participated in LAMP felt personally enriched by the opportunity to help young people. LAMP produced significant impacts on worksite participants' general employability skills, manufacturing skills, interest in training, and morale and productivity. LAMP also had positive impacts on worksite training practices, labor-management relations, and worker attitudes and behaviors. LAMP increased public education and school staff understanding of the power of partnerships and their understanding of manufacturing careers, and it helped administrators meet broader school-to-career and reform goals. In addition, LAMP helped parents develop more realistic expectations regarding their child's college and work ambitions. (Contains 11 references.) (MN)

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# Beyond the Success of the Students
## Effects of Participation on School-to-Career Partners

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**Abstract**

The success of school-to-career (STC) initiatives hinge on partnership. Many aspects of the STC agenda depend upon the involvement of business, labor, parents, and other community agencies. While the benefits for students are well-established, what are the benefits for partners? History and common sense suggest that partners tend to invest in partnerships to the degree they get something out of them. As STC initiatives become more complex and face issues of maintaining and sustaining, the need to document relevant outcomes to partners becomes more acute.

Early research suggests that partners are initially drawn to educational partnerships on altruistic grounds, but sustained involvement requires tangible returns. Recent research has begun to quantify the returns that accrue to employer partners. The current study adds to that literature by documenting an array of benefits that accrue to an entire set of partners from business, labor, schools, and the community.

Using a comprehensive case study design, the authors analyzed the participation of primary partners in a complex STC initiative and the outcomes that accrued to them. The authors found that all partners gained significant, tangible, and valuable outcomes that went beyond those originally envisioned. Program sponsors and policy makers can use this information to bolster partnership development strategies and sustain long-term educational reform efforts.

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**Introduction, Significance, and Statement of the Problem**

The success of school-to-career (STC) initiatives hinge upon partnerships. Two key ingredients of STC programs – paid work experience and work-based learning – can only be accomplished by involving the business and nonprofit communities. Other aspects of STC (e.g. integrated curriculum and alternative assessment), will not achieve their full potential without active involvement and support from education, business, labor, and parents. While the benefits for students are well-established, what are the benefits for partners?

Two frequently cited reasons employers have given for participating in educational partnerships are to prepare for existing or projected workforce skill shortages and to enhance community relations (McNeil and Kulick, 1995). More recent research suggests that employer partners actually expect a more immediate and tangible return on their investment (The Public Forum Institute, 2000; Ballen, et al., 1998; Bassi, et al., 1998).

As STC initiatives and their sustainability become more complex the need to document relevant outcomes to partners becomes more acute. Program managers and policy makers need to know what motivates partners and sponsors need to articulate what partners can realistically expect to get out of participation. Positive outcomes should encourage deeper levels of participation and extended commitment.

**Theoretical/conceptual base and related literature**

The enactment of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (STWOA) ushered in a new era of employer involvement in education reform and youth employment initiatives, and provided opportunities for increased parental involvement as well (Charner, 1997). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the STWOA is enhancing both the quantity and quality of employer participation in state and local efforts to prepare youth for employment, post-secondary education, and responsible citizenship (NES II, 1999; Wills, 1998; Bassi, et al., 1998).

The literature on STC partners tends to focus on employers. Several differences between old and new models of participation have been delineated (White and Rath, 1999; Kazis, 1998). In the old model, employers assumed few risks and reaped few, if any, long-range benefits. The new model shows employers engaged in "hands-on" activities, partnering with schools and parents to ensure that young people are better able to achieve their career aspirations. Employers are taking more risks and making strategic investments and realizing significantly higher returns on their investments (Ballen, et al. 1998; Bassi, et al. 1998, NIWL, 2000). The current study contributes to this literature by undertaking an examination the benefits that accrue to an entire set of school-business-community partners.

**Research methods and procedures**

We choose to examine a fairly sophisticated STC model that explicitly sought to build partnerships among business, labor, education, and parents. That model is known as the Lansing Area Manufacturing Partnership (LAMP). Partners include business (General Motors Corporation), organized labor (the United Auto Workers), the school district (Ingham [County]

Intermediate School District, Michigan), and the parents and guardians of the participating students.

Now in its fourth year of operation, LAMP is well on the way to establishing itself as a model STC initiative. Its innovative business/labor-driven integrated curriculum, its emphasis on project-based learning, its team teaching structure, and the opportunity for staff and students to establish close, ongoing interaction with employees, distinguish LAMP among other STC programs. More importantly, LAMP has taken on one of the thorniest issues facing the STC community: building genuine, active, collaborative relationships between the public, educational sector and the private, employment sector. LAMP's partnership structure provides a dramatic example of how such relationships can be forged and sustained.

The data on which this report is based were collected between April 1998 and June 2000 using a case study methodology. Sources of data include:

- Observation of student orientation, classroom and work-based instruction, mentor meetings, and Policy Board meetings;
- Focus groups of students and employees;
- Interviews with LAMP instructors, mentors, subject matter experts, curriculum developers, administrators, and counselors;
- Reviews of program materials and records;
- Tours, video presentations, and telephone calls with partners; and
- Surveys of graduates of the Classes of 1998 and 1999, parents of the Class of 1999, and workplace personnel.

**Findings**

As a partnership, LAMP's overarching goal is to produce improved educational outcomes for students. In fact, an evaluation of LAMP (MacAllum, et.al., 1999) reported positive outcomes for participating students. But what outcomes accrue to the individual partners who invested their resources of time, energy, creativity, materials, and money? Our research found that all partners experienced significant, tangible, and valuable outcomes beyond those originally envisioned. These are examined in the remainder of this paper.

## EFFECTS ON EMPLOYER AND UNION PARTNERS

The employer and union partners originally undertook the LAMP initiative with a fairly common goal of future-oriented enlightened self-interest. While not anticipating any immediate pay-off, they hoped that LAMP would eventually help the UAW and GM develop well-qualified manufacturing workers with a good understanding of the future of the industry. In practice, however, their participation led to additional, direct, and near-term impacts on the current workforce and workplace. Two categories of impacts are examined: individual and organizational.

## Participating Personnel

- **Individuals felt personally enriched by the opportunity to help young people.**

Worksite personnel were enthusiastic about the opportunity to help young people and felt rewarded on a personal level when they did so. Employees pointed to the satisfaction and enjoyment they felt, the personal growth they experienced, and the great strides they made in terms of their own understanding of the issues that youth are facing today. Nine out of ten mentors reported a "strong sense of satisfaction in helping a young person."

- **Individuals were empowered as consumers of the education system and as parents.**

Worksite personnel gained a better understanding of the current educational environment and their ability to impact it. Many confessed that they "were out of touch" with what was going on in high schools. LAMP helped parents in their involvement with their child's educational experience in various ways: as a frame of reference, an example of learning in context, or simply a starting point for a conversation about how their child learns. Ninety percent of mentors who were parents felt that LAMP helped them contribute to the personal and career development of their own children.

- **LAMP produced significant impacts on individuals' own careers and work life.**

Worksite personnel cited great benefits in the fresh perspectives and enhanced skills they gained as a result of communicating knowledge to students and helping them discover career-related information. Workers reported impacts in four areas: general employability skills; manufacturing skills; interest in training; and morale and productivity

**General employability skills.** Participation in LAMP improved the general employability skills of employees. Sixty-two percent indicated that LAMP helped them increase their communication skills a great deal, and 65% felt that LAMP enhanced their ability to describe their job and the skills it requires a great deal.

**Manufacturing skills.** Worksite personnel were called on to convey manufacturing expertise *to* students. Yet many employees learned something new about their own work environment. When asked to what extent LAMP had helped expand their knowledge of manufacturing processes, history, and context, 84% of those responding felt that it had helped "somewhat" or "a great deal." Over half reported that LAMP greatly helped enrich their network of contacts within the UAW and GM.

**Interest in training.** A significant proportion (42%) of worksite personnel felt that LAMP dramatically increased their interest in further education and training. Moreover, employees who attended conferences on integrated curriculum came back invigorated about the theories and concepts and applied these to both LAMP coursework with youth and adult worker training classes.

**Morale and productivity.** Worksite personnel indicated that LAMP had a positive impact

on their morale and a considerable number experienced a noticeable impact on their day-to-day productivity. One out of four (27%) rated their increase in morale as a dramatic "10" on a scale of 1 to 10. Employees reported they felt good about being able to share information about their job with students who found it interesting.

THE WORKPLACE

- **LAMP helps the UAW and GM develop well-qualified manufacturing workers with a good understanding of the future of the industry.**

Worksite personnel who were involved with LAMP students believed that the students had a good grasp of the industry and would make qualified workers. Seventy-seven percent of respondents thought LAMP "helped develop manufacturing workers with a good understanding of the future of the industry." Students themselves felt they gained a better understanding of unions, GM, and the world of manufacturing and were well-prepared to succeed in a manufacturing career. Employees observed LAMP students gaining a deeper and broader understanding of manufacturing, demonstrating flexibility around team roles, exhibiting knowledge about multiple machines, being less resistant to change, and having a good sense of underlying concepts like quality and system interdependencies that will serve them well in the manufacturing workforce.

- **LAMP has influenced worksite practices.**

Worksite personnel and others reported changes that were occurring around training the existing workforce. In addition, some believed that LAMP had positive effects on labor-management relations. And finally, individual employees pointed out that LAMP may have changed attitudes, behavior, and practices of the current workforce.

**Training.** Worksite personnel reported changes in instructional methodology, new approaches to existing classes, and even the possibility of offering large parts of the LAMP curriculum as new classes for existing workers. LAMP has led some worksite personnel to make changes to existing classes. For example, LAMP instructors are working with trainers to modify Health and Safety training to make it easier to learn and more interactive.

**Changes in instructional methodology.** Worksite trainers indicated that their participation in LAMP has influenced their instructional methods and approaches. LAMP offered the simple but important benefit of allowing trainers the opportunity to observe others' teaching styles and methods and consider the applications. Worksite trainers also reported that they are looking at revising the traditional Basic Problem-Solving class by working with LAMP teachers to make it more activity-based and participatory.

**Using the LAMP curriculum.** Some worksite personnel are interested in creating a version of LAMP's curriculum geared toward the existing workforce or initial hires. As one UAW-GM representative stated:

*"We are looking at a spinoff of LAMP-like training for new hires for the plant. We could put existing employees through the training, drawing from the LAMP curriculum in*

*quality, manufacturing, design, and concepts of how it all comes together."*

**Labor-management relations.** Working with LAMP students helped labor-management relations in the workplace by encouraging teamwork, opening lines of communication, and, as one employee put it, "neutralize the tendency toward finger-pointing." Even after LAMP students leave, there appears to be a residual affect whereby employees and managers interact more, communicate more effectively, and contribute more.

**Attitudinal and behavioral changes.** Working with LAMP and seeing the students in action required the current workforce to pay more attention to standard operating procedures and teamwork. Employees noted that LAMP made the current workforce more aware of and sensitive to diversity, new perspectives, and a "modern" view of their industry. LAMP introduces young people into a workplace where many employees have long tenures, generating a renewed enthusiasm to try new ideas however "off-the-wall" they may seem. Promising student recommendations to improve productivity, reduce waste, and lower costs are in fact being seriously considered for adoption.

## EFFECTS ON PUBLIC EDUCATION AND SCHOOL STAFF

The influence of LAMP on participating school districts can be seen beyond the students enrolled. Those touched by the program include administrators and staff at the participating schools, non-LAMP students who are classmates of LAMP students, and traditional classroom teachers creating opportunities to have far-reaching effects on education.

LAMP has increased the awareness and understanding of how partnerships can be powerful tools in restructuring education. For many in the school system, LAMP has confirmed the need to develop partnerships with external organizations as a catalyst for internal change. While focused on manufacturing specifically, observers commented on how the lessons of the LAMP partnership can be applied in other settings.

Some in the educational community have been most impressed by the governance structure of the partnership. The close collaboration between GM and the UAW encouraged the Ingham ISD to include its teacher union in areas of governance and decision-making in ways it had not before. This new collaborative approach was cited as an example of how LAMP had already begun to influence the way business was conducted within the ISD.

LAMP demonstrates how educators can contribute to workforce development while maintaining their historical commitment to academic rigor. LAMP creates a "learning lab" where new ideas and approaches to education can be tried out and modeled. All partners recognize that these students will eventually enter the workforce, whether they pursue higher education immediately after high school or not. Senior school officials have articulated the importance of education contributing more directly to the economic vitality of the area. As one stated, "we perceive LAMP as linked to Lansing's efforts to retain its plants. Lansing needs a strong workforce, so we need to produce good employees and good workers."

**Innovative curriculum and instruction.** When asked what distinguished LAMP from other educational reforms, school staff point to the integrated curriculum and innovative instructional strategies, and specifically, the curriculum's project-based nature, its emphasis on experiential and contextual learning, and its focus on developing problem-solving skills.

Other educational strategies modeled by LAMP that have captured the attention of key administrators include: cooperative learning (learning in teams), alternative assessment (through student performances and Capstone presentations), and heterogeneous classroom (diverse students in the same classroom). In this section, we examine the specific impacts LAMP is having on the local school system and its personnel.

- **School staff gained a greater understanding of manufacturing, the UAW, and GM.**

LAMP appears to have been successful in influencing the perceptions and understandings of key educational partners. As one superintendent said, "LAMP has had impact in Ingham, because we are partners at the table." This impact was described as "a very different picture of the workplace, a different perspective on what it takes to work in a workplace with a union. Our understanding has grown significantly." Likewise, worksite personnel gained insight into educational policy and practice.

The ability of LAMP to improve understanding is primarily attributed to the partnership structure. The opportunity to convene and communicate around common goals is key. LAMP's Policy Board meetings have been described as "different cultures getting to know each other, gaining a better understanding of what each other values and needs." The partnership structure provides a platform for true understanding to occur, through close, on-going dialogue, access to each other's environment, and joint decision-making. Worksite personnel rated LAMP's ability to help public school educators understand the changing needs of the manufacturing industry as one of the program's strongest impacts.

- **LAMP has broadened awareness of manufacturing careers among educational staff.**

One desired impact of LAMP is to raise the visibility and reputation of manufacturing as a career of choice among those who will counsel future graduates. LAMP has begun making progress by adopting contemporary language and highlighting the cutting-edge nature of modern manufacturing for students and staff. The impact has been greatest among counseling staff, who tend to have familiarized themselves with the LAMP initiative more than traditional classroom instructors. These counselors in turn, share practical career information in general and LAMP information in particular, with the students they counsel.

Students were asked if their participation in LAMP was discussed as part of the conversations they had with their guidance counselor about post-graduation plans. Of those who did meet with their counselor senior year, 80% did reference LAMP in those conversations. (Surprisingly, 20% of the students indicated they did not meet with their guidance counselor at all.) Counselors we spoke with indicated that they have gained a new appreciation for manufacturing as a career as a result of LAMP. Other counselors have seized upon the value of the LAMP as an important factor in the college admissions process, talking up the benefits

of participation to college recruiters.

To gauge level of awareness concerning LAMP at the home school, students were asked if their teachers knew about their participation in LAMP, both at the beginning and end of the school year. Three quarters (74%) reported that most of their teachers did know about their participation at the beginning of the year. That figure rose slightly to 80% at the end of the year, indicating a fairly high level of awareness among home school teachers. Of those who were aware of their student's participation in LAMP, virtually all of them were characterized as supportive. Also, about half of the Class of 1999 (47%) discussed LAMP with their home school teachers during conversations about their post-graduation plans. We expect this awareness will eventually translate into renewed practice in the traditional classroom.

- **LAMP helped administrators meet broader school-to-career and reform goals.**

Many school administrators at the district level have faced the challenge of implementing a school-to-career system for the past several years. To them, LAMP represents one of many potential programs that may help to address the school-to-work transition. Without exception, the opportunity to participate in LAMP is interpreted by these administrators as a valuable learning experience, often modeling the components of a school-to-career system that may eventually permeate the public school system. The elements frequently mentioned include contextual teaching, cooperative (team-based) learning, alternative assessment, and the partnership structure itself. All the administrators interviewed (100%) were able to articulate at least one example of how LAMP was helping them better implement or promote broader school reforms within their particular school setting.

LAMP's alternative assessment strategies, specifically the opportunity for students to demonstrate application of knowledge through the Capstone experience and end-of-unit presentations, have captured the attention of public school administrators. Most recognize these strategies as a useful way of assessing student achievement that realistically reflects how individuals are often judged in the world of work.

The administrators acknowledged that the road to broad implementation of these and other dimensions of LAMP in the traditional classroom will likely be long and rugged. However, it is important to recognize LAMP as a potential catalyst for broad reform. Administrators appreciate the unique approaches to education embedded in LAMP, while at the same time they appreciate how LAMP complements and supports other approaches already in place. As one superintendent summarized, "There are a lot of different pieces in the district. LAMP is a significant component. All these distinct pieces are now starting to align."

More than anything else, participation in LAMP has reminded administrators of the value and need to introduce notions of career development, planning, and guidance into middle school and the earlier grades. Articulation with institutions of higher education is another area that is recognized as needing further exploration. Given the high percentage of LAMP graduates who enroll in Lansing Community College (44% of this year's graduating class), the opportunity to create articulation agreements is an option likely to be pursued by program administrators.

## EFFECTS ON PARENTS

One of the most exciting findings to emerge from our study concerns the impact of LAMP on parental involvement in the education of their children. By all accounts, parents of LAMP students appear to be more engaged and involved in their children's education than parents of students in traditional high schools. One hundred percent of the parents reported that they discuss school and participation in LAMP with their child, and about 86% do this regularly or every day. Eighty-eight percent of parents reported that communication with their child about education and career plans has increased quite a bit or more.

Re-engaging parents in the educational enterprise of their children is an issue secondary school educators wrestle with across the nation. LAMP has succeeded in increasing the involvement of parents with high school age children in both their current educational experience and their future decision-making. It is not surprising to hear Lansing area administrators repeatedly comment that "we're really pleased with the support from parents and the opportunity for parental engagement." LAMP, firmly grounded in the world of work, provides a point of reference meaningful to parents, educators, and students alike.

- **Parents' expectations concerning their child's college and work ambitions became more realistic.**

Choosing an appropriate career path is an important yet sometimes daunting challenge. The vast majority of parents (92%) reported that LAMP helped their child develop realistic college and/or career plans. Further, 94% of the parents whose children were planning to enroll in college reported that LAMP was helpful in making better decisions about college.

From the parental perspective, LAMP provided valuable career development support. When asked to describe the impact LAMP had on their child's education plans, 70% of parents reported that LAMP had a "great" impact with only 10% reporting it had very little influence.

Nine out of ten parents (94%) considered LAMP to have been helpful in their actual decisions concerning educational and training choices. Most parents (82%) characterized LAMP's influence as having been "very helpful" to their child in making career decisions.
LAMP created opportunities for parents to become more effectively involved in their child's decision-making. Nearly nine out of ten parents (87%) perceived LAMP as having been "very helpful" to students and their families in making decisions about finding and obtaining a job. Three out of four parents reported that LAMP had a "great" impact on their child's career plans.

- **Parents became more involved in their child's education as a result of LAMP.**

During interviews, school administrators commented that LAMP "enhanced the quality of the relationship between parents and the educational experience of their children." Survey data from the parents themselves confirm this observation. One of the ways that LAMP augments parental involvement is to require potential LAMP students to attend the preliminary informational session accompanied by a parent. In nearly half of the cases, both parents attended the initial information session, indicating a high level of family involvement.

During the early phase of the application process, 88% of the parents characterized themselves as at least "considerably" interested in the LAMP program, while 65% described themselves as "extremely" interested. This suggests that parental belief in the value of participation in LAMP played a role in the application decision for a majority of eventual students. Indeed, some students reported that parental influence was one of the main reasons for their application to LAMP.

One of the most significant findings to emerge from the parent survey concerned the influence of LAMP on communication between parent and child. Every single parent (100%) reported that they discussed school and participation in LAMP with their child, and about 86% did this regularly or every day. Eighty-eight percent reported that communication increased "quite a bit" or more with nearly a third reporting that their level of communication increased "a great deal."

Likewise, the LAMP students themselves reported that participation in LAMP increased the level of communication with their parents about future education and career plans. Nearly 60% reported that communication with parents increased "quite a bit" or more.

- **Parents reported greater participation in their child's educational decision-making.**

Parental involvement in their child's educational decision-making appears to be strong during the application process and continues through, and possibly beyond, graduation. Parents played a notable role in their child's decision to apply for and participate in LAMP. Over half of the parents claimed to be at least "considerably" influential in their child's decision.

LAMP parents maintained very high attendance rates (86%) at parent/teacher conferences. This reflects a higher level of parental interest and involvement than in traditional school settings. Over three quarters of the parents (78%) were very satisfied with the level of information they received about their child's participation in LAMP. However, only 30% of parents claimed to be "very familiar" with the structure of the LAMP program, and over a third (35%) said they were only "somewhat familiar" with its structure. While this finding is consistent with the assumption that parents are more focused on outcomes than process, it does suggest room for improved communication with parents about how LAMP is conceived and organized.

- **Parents developed a better understanding and more positive perception of manufacturing, the UAW, and GM as a result of LAMP.**

As noted earlier, perceptions concerning the manufacturing industry, GM and the UAW, even within the Lansing community, are often ambivalent. Therefore, it is important to note that LAMP has influenced parental opinions of the automotive manufacturing industry. Seven out of ten (69%) LAMP parents reported that their impressions of the UAW and GM had been changed as a result of their experience with LAMP. Of those, 100% reported that their impression improved.

Moreover, 86% of parents reported having a more favorable view towards manufacturing as a career choice for their child as a result of their experience with LAMP. A large majority (63%), characterized their opinion of manufacturing as being "much more favorable."

Parents have responded favorably to the rigor of the integrated work-based curriculum and convey their support of it to school administrators. As one administrator stated, parents have indicated that they "are pleased that their schools are supporting GM." The high level of positive response from parents should help allay fears of educators who are apprehensive about community reaction to anything that is not purely "academic."

**Implications and recommendations**

Learning is not the exclusive province of schools. In addition to schools, families, communities, and workplaces offer valuable learning environments for students. Indeed, all of these are specifically recognized as key partners by the STWOA and their participation is central to successful enactment of the legislation. While appeals to corporate citizenship and the intrinsic satisfaction of improving education may generate initial interest and support, long-term participation and commitment will likely depend upon empirical demonstration of more immediate and tangible returns.

This study documents an array of impacts that accrue to the partnering organizations of a complex STC initiative. Specific and unique benefits valued by the respective partners were identified, suggesting that each can expect to obtain more from participation than intrinsic satisfaction. While congruent with recent research which has found a positive return on investment for employers, the findings from this study suggest positive results for school staff and parents as well.

Program sponsors and policy makers can use this information to bolster partnership development strategies by confidently appealing to enlightened self-interest. In turn, partners can defend their decisions to enter into partnerships with education on the basis of rational cost-benefit analyses.

It is worth noting that the rate of return enjoyed by an organization appears to be directly related to its level of investment. In contrast to many STC initiatives where industry plays a symbolic and therefore less active role, the employer partners in LAMP have made deep and genuine commitments to the program. Workplace staff have made significant contributions to all aspects of the initiative. In turn, substantial dividends to the workplace have begun to accrue. Likewise, among the educational partners, the degree of involvement varied across the 20 individual schools that are participating in the LAMP initiative. Those that are more actively involved in the partnership have tended to experience greater gains. The same seems to hold true for parents and families. Thus, it would behoove partners to heed the old adage that they are likely to get out in proportion to what they put in.

While students are clearly experiencing positive educational and developmental gains through a challenging integrated curriculum, work-based learning experiences, increased access to adults and mentors, and improved communication with parents, the effects of participation in STC appear to extend beyond the success of the students.

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